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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION NO. 14

26 January 1951

FOR: National Estimates Board

SUBJECT: The Military Situation in Korea

Sir Benegal Rau's statement on 25 January that the reported lull in the Korean fighting "may not be without significance" has increased speculation on Chinese Communist intentions in Korea. UN forces in Korea have not been in contact with the mass of Chinese Communist 4th Field Army troops in the western sector since the UN withdrawal to defense positions 40 miles south of Seoul in early January. No contact has been made with Chinese 3rd Field Army units in the eastern or central sectors since the evacuation from Hungnam. Although recent UN patrol actions in western Korea indicate a withdrawal of Chinese troops from advanced positions, field reports do not indicate that major Chinese units of the 4th Field Army have withdrawn from their reported locations south of Seoul and the Han River. Although 3rd Field Army units are believed to have moved southward into central Korea, there are indications that some shattered elements have withdrawn to Manchuria for reorganization. There are, however, continuing reports of supply buildups in the enemy rear characteristic of preparations for offensive action. It has been the experience in Korea that Chinese Communist troops, because of their limited transport facilities, require considerable time for re-supply between major offensive operations.

Following the first large Communist offensive along the Chongchon River on 28 November 1950, the Chinese required a month in which to prepare for their second assault on 31 December, which carried them across the 38th Parallel. Their supply lines now are even longer, and heavy casualties were suffered during November and December operations. The Far East Command has estimated that the Chinese Communists have suffered over 100,000 casualties in Korea, and they would be forced to accept a far greater number in a determined effort to force UN troops out of Korea. Because heavy losses of experienced troops cannot be easily and quickly replaced, even though China has a large manpower reserve, field observers feel that the Chinese may now be reluctant to spearhead additional attacks.

Meanwhile, field reports indicate a feverish effort has been underway since November to reconstruct a North Korean Army, far larger than the original force of 120,000 that invaded South Korea last June. During the past few months, North Korean units have borne the brunt of the fighting around Wonju in central Korea and intelligence officers have speculated that the Chinese are now holding back until the North Koreans are strong enough to undertake major attacks.

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